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THE H. JOHN HEINZ III CENTER FOR SCIENCE, ECONOMICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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For Immediate Release: September 24, 2002 12:30 p.m. EDT

HEINZ CENTER ISSUES LANDMARK REPORT ON STATE OF THE NATION'S ECOSYSTEMS

Unique Collaboration Presents Key Environmental Indicators and Identifies Gaps

WASHINGTON, D.C.— A new environmental study identifies major gaps in what is known about the nation's lands, waters, and living resources and proposes periodic reporting of key indicators that will inform and influence policy discussions for generations to come.

The highly anticipated report by The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment is a succinct and comprehensive—yet unbiased and scientifically sound—examination of the current state of the nation's lands, waters, and living resources. An unprecedented collaboration among nearly 150 experts from government, business, environmental organizations, and academia, the study identifies indicators and reports the best available data on conditions and trends.

The State of the Nation's Ecosystems: Measuring the Lands, Waters, and Living Resources of the United States presents a compelling argument for reporting environmental indicators, much as key data are reported to help gauge the state of the national economy.

"Just as economic policies are informed through a set of key indicators such as gross domestic product, inflation, unemployment, and the balance of trade, we as a nation must have clear indicators of the condition of our ecosystems as a basis for shaping public policies and private sector initiatives," said **William Clark**, a professor at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and chairman of the project.

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"Without agreement on what indicators we should use to measure our progress, it is extremely difficult for lawmakers, regulators, and the public to make informed choices about the direction our policies should be taking," said **Tom Jorling**, Vice President, Environmental Affairs for International Paper, former environmental commissioner in New York State, and the chair of a group of senior advisors for the project. "*The State of the Nation's Ecosystems* is an important first step toward remedying this unsatisfactory situation."

The report provides indicators for the nation as a whole and for its coasts and oceans, forests, farmlands, fresh waters, grasslands and shrublands, and urban and suburban areas. For each of these systems, the study reports on ten key characteristics of ecosystems that should be tracked over time, and, where the data are available, it describes current conditions and trends. The ten categories, characterized by about 100 indicators in all, are

- Ecosystem extent – Gains or losses in the area covered by a particular ecosystem
- Fragmentation and landscape pattern – Size, shape, proximity and other patterns of how ecosystems are arranged on the landscape
- Building blocks of life – Amounts and concentrations of key chemicals (nitrogen, phosphorous, carbon, and oxygen) that play vital roles in ecosystems
- Contaminants – The extent of chemical contamination, as well as the frequency with which contaminant levels exceed regulatory standards and advisory guidelines
- Physical conditions – The condition of important physical characteristics of a particular ecosystem, such as coastal erosion or the depth to groundwater
- Plants and animals – The presence and condition of native and non-native species of plants and animals
- Biological communities – The condition of groups of plants and animals that form the "biological neighborhood" for other species
- Plant growth and productivity – The amount of plant growth, which reflects the amount of energy entering an ecosystem and available to all organisms
- Production of food and fiber and use of water – Quantities of goods produced by ecosystems, such as crops, livestock, timber, fish, and water
- Recreation and other services – Activities like swimming, hiking, biking, and hunting, and other services, including plant pollination and flood reduction

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"The report brings together in one place indicator data produced by a wide array of excellent but independent environmental monitoring efforts run by both government and private organizations," **Clark** noted. "These data reveal a rich, complex, and often surprising picture of the state of our nation's ecosystems. Equally important, however, the report shows where that picture is incomplete: nearly half the indicators lack sufficient data."

Participants in the study included representatives of industry and environmental organizations, elected and appointed leaders from local, state and federal government, and scholars. Nine federal agencies and thirteen corporations and foundations funded the project, which was commissioned by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. It calls for annual updates and a revised edition every five years.

"This report is particularly important," said **Thomas Lovejoy**, president of The Heinz Center and formerly an advisor to the World Bank and assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, "Because our participants—including many traditional adversaries—put aside their differences to agree on scientifically grounded and policy-relevant indicators for describing the state of our natural systems."

"Policymaking about the environment will always be contentious in a democracy," **Lovejoy** said, "But debates on how best to manage our nation's natural resources should not be sidetracked through needless debates about the facts. As a nation, we must embrace these indicators, maintain the essential monitoring programs on which they are based, and launch additional efforts to ensure a comprehensive, sustained national reporting program."

The State of the Nation's Ecosystems **is published by Cambridge University Press and is also available in full at www.heinzctr.org/ecosystems.**

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Established in December 1995 in honor of the late Senator John Heinz, The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution dedicated to improving the scientific and economic foundation for environmental policy through multisectoral collaboration. Focusing on issues that are likely to confront policymakers within two to five years, the Center fosters collaboration among industry, environmental organizations, academia, and government in each of its program areas and projects. It uses the best scientific and economic analyses to develop viable options to solving problems, and its findings and recommendations are widely disseminated to public and private sector decision makers, the scientific community, and the public.